

Politics and People

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WASHINGTON.

Luck has been lacking for Mr. Herbert Hoover, Jr. Things persist in going awry when he is left in charge of the store at the State Department. Questions have plainly occurred to the White House as to the capacity of the Under Secretary of State for the role of presidential adviser-in-chief on world diplomacy. It is a development with a measure of irony, because no showing of diplomatic talent was asked for when Mr. Hoover was appointed No. 2 man in the department a little more than two years ago. He was brought in as an administrator who would take care of the housekeeping for an establishment with 20,000 employees, leaving Mr. John Foster Dulles free for high-level cogitation and personal diplomacy around the world. In that function, Mr. Hoover was a success. A fair measure of his performance in the field of international politics is the disappearance of his name from conjecture about a new Secretary should Mr. Dulles depart.

Since the disability of Mr. Dulles during the crises in Hungary and the Near East, President Eisenhower has acted in increasing fashion as his own Secretary of State while still consulting regularly with Mr. Hoover as the acting Secretary. Although the White House found it expedient to enter a denial, it has been fairly well established that the Administration was preparing to go outside the State Department to get a special presidential adviser on international affairs until Mr. Hoover learned of its intent and made his objection known. The adviser would have been Mr. Hoover's predecessor, Walter Bedell Smith.

It was in character for Mr. Eisenhower to countermand a step which would have exposed Mr. Hoover to embarrassment. The President has often given expression to his high personal regard for the son of the last preceding Republican President. Upon one occasion last year, when his own political plans were still unformulated, Mr. Eisenhower designated the Under Secretary of State as representative of younger presidential material in the Republican party. (Mr. Hoover is 53. Whether he is constitutionally eligible for the presidency is debatable. He was born in England. The Constitution declares, in language whose meaning is obscure, that the President must be a "natural-born citizen.")

The complimentary suggestion evoked no thanks from Mr. Hoover, who is as stiffnecked as his father. Questioned whether he might have political ambitions, the Under Secretary said: "I do not wish to be disrespectful, but I have not the slightest interest in politics." Later, he was described as shocked and unhappy when his name was advanced in speculation as a possible nominee for Vice President in the event Mr. Richard M. Nixon left the ticket. It may have been significant that the cheering for Mr. Hoover as a potential replacement came exclusively from the party's Old Guard. His political views appear to be conservative, but considerably more internationalist than those of his father. The distaste for politics voiced by the Under Secretary reflects his dismay as a young man at the partisan attacks upon his father, who was in the White House when the great depression began and was ejected by the electorate at the first opportunity.

Mr. Hoover became Under Secretary of State October 4, 1954. He quickly became renowned as the most inaccessible official in Washington, a reputation he retains. His dislike for the spotlight has been in notable contrast to the attitude of his superior, Mr. Dulles, whose propensity for public expression is such that unfeeling critics, probably Democrats, have dubbed him Secretary of Statements.

In private life Mr. Hoover was a highly successful engineer, specializing in oil exploration services. It was a profession that took him to many parts of the world and led, indirectly, to the State Department. During the war he had been in the oil fields of Iran. At the invitation of the State Department he went back there in 1953 when the fields were idle in a stalemate between the Iranian Government, which had expropriated them, and the evicted British operators. Mr. Hoover arrived at a time when both sides were in need of a face-saving solution, and in eleven months of patient negotiations he effected an arrangement which returned the fields to production. The achievement was applauded as a diplomatic triumph, although Mr. Hoover attributed it largely to luck in that he arrived on the spot at the right time. His subsequent appointment as Under Secretary was confirmed by the Senate in a single day, without debate and without dissent.

Because Mr. Dulles is absent from Washington so much, Mr. Hoover has frequently been acting Secretary, as he is now, and on several such occasions has been involved in notorious bloopers. When he embargoed a shipment of tanks to Saudi Arabia, Mr. Dulles came back to town and released them for shipment, announcing that it was American policy to provide arms to that nation. Mr. Hoover has been similarly over-ruled on other stops taken as a stand-in.